

# THE DEMOCRATIC VIEW - Health care market isn't working

BY STEVE HERR SPECIAL TO THE KENOSHA NEWS

Our health care system originally started with non-profit community hospitals and religious orders treating the ill (sounds like “socialism” to me) but turned into corporatism run amok.

Republicans want to rely on the “free market system” to solve our health care woes. Unfortunately, health care does not meet the economic definition of a truly competitive market — plenty of buyers and sellers and true price information available to all.

As a small business owner, I recently went shopping for health insurance. The insurance agent laid it on the line for me: Effectively, there were only two companies operating in southern Wisconsin that would come close to meeting our needs. That does not meet the definition of a free market; it takes many suppliers in order to have true competition.

Much less, most consumers of health can't vote with their dollars, because their employers buy it for them.

And how about knowing what medical procedures are going to cost before you buy? It's already impossible to figure out what you bought after you get the hospital bill!

Nor does the buyer even know how much coverage they will get when they sign up. It may appear that you are covered, but then the insurance company denies claims arbitrarily.

The United States is the only major industrialized country in the world that does not have some form of socialized health care, and we suffer for it. We use up over 15 percent of our Gross National Product (all of the economy) to provide health care, whereas the countries we are competing against in the world market use 10 percent or less of their economy to provide health care.

That extra 5 percent we spend on health care is mostly paper shuffling and insurance company profits — middlemen not providing a productive service, but who are a 5 percent anchor dragging down our whole economy.

American companies competing in the world market start with a 5 percent disadvantage if they are a responsible company providing health care, or are incentivised to send production overseas or drop their health coverage.

Meanwhile, by any reasonable standard of measurement, health care outcomes in the United States are ranked at the bottom of industrialized countries. Maybe “corporatism” for health care isn't such a good idea if it means a 5 percent penalty on our economy and poor performance.

To those who are concerned about “rationing” of government sponsored health care, I ask, do you really think private insurance companies will approve an organ transplant for a 90 year old? Of course not; private insurance does ration health care. They even denied a liver transplant for a 17-year-old girl, who then died. I would much rather have the government deciding what treatments should be approved — based on guidelines we can steer through our votes — than treatments determined by a corporate bottom line that we can't affect because of the lack of competition, transparency and accountability.

For some services, such as streets, police, fire departments, schools, parks, libraries, water and sewers, it just makes sense to band together as a community. So why not follow the other industrialized countries and band together in one giant non-profit government health insurance pool?

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